United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Reserve Program
MCM Job Sheet

Ohio – May 2010

CRP Mid-Contract Management: Soil and Vegetation Disturbance (Level II – No Field Assessment)

For:			
Field(s):	Acres:	Farm #:	Tract #:
Planned By:			Date:

BACKGROUND

Grassland fields need to be managed so that grasses do not crowd out the forbs and legumes over time. If no disturbance occurs the composition of grassland communities will change over several years through normal plant succession. Typically, grasses begin to dominate stands to the point that beneficial forbs are reduced. Also, the amount of bare ground declines, litter accumulates and overall vegetation density increases. These changes may lead to a decline in habitat value for many desirable wildlife species.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Disturbance practice is to enhance the wildlife habitat value of the enrolled acres by increasing the amount of bare soil and by encouraging a diverse forb/legume community. Forbs (any broadleaf plant) and legumes in grasslands are beneficial to birds, insects such as butterflies, and other wildlife. Disturbance is an effective management tool that can be utilized where vegetation has become too thick to benefit the target species.

Soil disturbance enhances the habitat quality in a variety of ways. The incorporation of plant litter and thatch favors many wildlife species which need some bare soil. Areas that are disturbed may be seeded or grow back naturally to a greater variety of plant species, especially forbs; this increases food sources both from seeds and insects found on these plants. Disturbance also creates greater structural diversity as the plant density and height will be different in disked versus undisked areas.

Disturbance is especially helpful for maintaining brood-rearing habitat for bobwhite quail, wild turkey, and ring-necked pheasant. The insects

associated with annual weed communities provide critical nutrients for growing nestlings and chicks. Reduced plant residue and increased bare ground are critical for young chick mobility in grassland areas.

Many grassland songbirds have shown significant declines over the last 50 years. Providing diversity in vegetation structure benefits a wider range of species. Some species such as meadowlarks, vesper sparrows, grasshopper sparrows and savannah sparrows benefit from a more open stand than is typically found in CRP.

An increase in the amount and diversity of flowering plants in the CRP area will improve its value for a variety of pollinators. Some insects such as butterflies, native bees, beetles and flies are critical as pollinators of agricultural and horticultural crops. Disturbance (with or without interseeding) usually promotes an increase in the number of plants that serve as important alternate food sources and nesting sites for these pollinators.

APPLICABILITY

This practice may be used on CP1, CP2 andCP10 where a field assessment was not performed.

SPECIFICATIONS

The specifications for soil and vegetation disturbance on CRP acreage must be followed:

- NRCS eFOTG Standard *Upland Wildlife Habitat Management* (645) will be utilized for this practice.
- Grassland fields must be established for a minimum of three years before initiating this practice.
- At least 50% of the contract acres shall be disturbed.
- Areas treated may be in blocks or strips.
- The soil disturbance operations will result in areas having **40-70% bare soil** within the treated area.
- Any tillage tool which achieves this result may be used; this may require several passes depending on the density of the vegetation and the tillage tool used.
- Soil disturbance operations will be performed along field contours, or across the slope, when practical. Strips will parallel brushy or woody escape cover when feasible.
- Tillage may be performed between July 16 and February 28; however it should occur after September 1. Optimal forb production occurs with soil disturbance between October 1 and December 31
- Disturbance shall <u>not</u> be performed in the following areas:
    - Areas where treatment will have minimal affect or potentially cause a long-term negative impact on existing cover.
    - Areas planted to trees and/or shrubs; within 5 feet of trees or shrubs; or riparian forest buffers
    - Concentrated flow areas, critical areas, scour areas on floodplains or areas where gully erosion is likely to occur
    - The first 30 feet that borders a stream, ditch, lake or other water body

CONSIDERATIONS

- Give the highest priority for treatment to areas that are dominated by a single plant species, especially a dense, monotypic stand of grasses such as fescue or smooth brome.
- Disturbing low, wet areas should be avoided because these areas often develop wetland plant communities, adding additional plant diversity to the site.
- Consider spot spraying or mowing areas where noxious weeds such as Canada thistle or johnsongrass exist. This will reduce the potential for unintentional establishment of these species.
- If spraying herbicide, work with a local consultant or Ohio State Extension Specialist to determine the best herbicide combination and apply it at the appropriate time in the fall. Follow the manufacturer's label rates and guidelines when applying herbicides.
- Participants should be wary of tile blowholes, groundhog holes, fallen tree limbs, and other hazards that may have developed since they were last in the field.
- Consider the habitat needs of the target wildlife species. Areas disturbed in late summer or early fall will tend to stimulate the production of hard-seeded plants. These species provide excellent brood-rearing cover and winter food for quail and pheasants.
- The presence of annual weeds (such as foxtail, common ragweed, and perennial forbs) is not a concern, as these plants are important sources of food for wildlife, especially bobwhite quail. The purpose of seedbed preparation is to control the density of these annuals during the establishment year, not to eliminate this group of plants.
- Disturbance in February (if field conditions are conducive to tillage) may make it easier to cut up thick stands of grasses.

CERTIFICATION

The participant is responsible for certifying to FSA when the practice has been completed.

Mid-Contract Management cost-share payment for this practice is $6.50 per acre per pass of tillage.

Cost-share Payment Limitations for all MCM activities are:

- $50.00 per acre per year
- $100.00 per acre total for the life of the contract

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is responsible for administering the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP policy requires that starting with Signup 26, participants must perform management activities that maintain or enhance the quality of conservation cover for wildlife benefits.

The FSA has requested the assistance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and/or other partners to conduct an on-site assessment of the conservation cover. NRCS and/or the partners have evaluated the condition and density of the stand; the grass/forb species present; and have recommended this MCM practice to the FSA and the participant. FSA and NRCS representatives will meet with the participant and discuss the MCM options available and the appropriate incentive payments if applicable.

Signing this MCM Job Sheet is considered an addendum to the Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO). No modification of the CPO will be necessary.

SIGNATURES			
NRCS Representative	Date	FSA Representative	Date
I understand the plan and specifications and agree to perform this practice accordingly.			
Participant			Date

AD-862 Control Number: